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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000568

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF AND PM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/13/2015

TAGS: PREL MOPS MARR PGOV ET DJ

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON ETHIOPIAN HELICOPTER CREW ASYLUM REQUEST

REF: DJIBOUTI 562

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARGUERITA D. RAGSDALE.

REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Deputy Director of National Security Service, Abdillahi Mohamed Abdillahi, told Embassy officer that the highest ranking official among the helicopter crew that sought asylum in Djibouti 6/9 (see reftel) had been a "general." It is unclear if this individual actually piloted the aircraft. According to Abdillahi, the helicopter involved in the asylum attempt had been taken out of Dire Dawa and flown to Djibouti. Djibouti had decided to hand over the three who commandeered the craft, Abdillahi said, because of an agreement among limitrophe countries that if property is stolen in an effort to gain asylum in a neighboring country, that country would deny asylum and return the individual or individuals and the property to the country of origin.

¶2. (C) During preparation for repatriation by air, however, the pilot who had commandeered the helicopter created a scene on the tarmac, and refused to board the aircraft for the return. The transfer was called off, temporarily, but later re-activated after consultation with President Guelleh. As a result, according to Abdillahi, actual repatriation did not occur until the following day, 6/10, and it took place over land. (Note: We have not independently confirmed. End note.)

¶3. (C) The fate of the individuals upon their return to Ethiopia is not known at this time. Expulsion from the military, prison, or execution are likely results. As for the reasons for the asylum attempt in the first place, only discontent with the current political situation in Ethiopia has been cited.

RAGSDALE